

Is That So?

Ever been tickled silly? Then perhaps you know how a bird may feel when it's anting. Anting? you ask. What's that? Anting is the placing of live ants by the bird in its own wing and tail feathers perhaps to aid in its toilet, perhaps to stimulate it. And, somewhat as with human tickling, the results are so overpowering that the bird seems transported into a state of ecstasy in which fellow



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rivalry, domination and enmity are often forgotten.

Strangely enough, as common and clownishly funny as bird anting may be, it took an observant youngster, Peter Bradley, to bring bird anting to the attention of the world's bird experts. And now, scarcely a score of years later, thanks to him, it is commonly recognized among bird experts.

Watching starlings pick up ants and stow them beneath their wings, Peter reported this at once to an authority on Australian birds, A. H. Chisholm. Although doubting the boy's eyesight, Chisholm in turn reported it in a bird magazine and soon afterwards received confirmation from bird observers in four continents corroborating the small boy's observation.

Because the performance is usually extremely rapid it is most difficult to follow... with a resultant confusion among observers as to just what is going on.

Observers Agree

But upon this, all observers agree: the gyrations a bird goes through in anting can be hilarious to watch. To place the ant under the wings, the tail is sometimes brought so far under and forward that the bird steps on it and then he may tumble over or even make a complete somersault.

Among wild birds observed taking this anting treatment, have been a flock of 30 grosbeaks—essentially quarrelsome birds—taking turns, one at a time, occupying a small two by two-foot ant-occupied area; at another time, a pair of starlings settled themselves into an ant's nest and then threw the ants over their feathers with every sign of solid enjoyment. Tame jays, crows and thrushes have been seen too—the latter sometimes taking 25 minutes for the ant-toileting. But more than these, robins particularly seem given to anting—in one report, a robin drove off a second from the ant bed; and he was replaced by a third who occupied the favored spot for a few minutes; and then the three birds took "turn and turn about."

To make a thorough study of this curious behavior, H. Roy Ivor, a Canadian ornithologist, scattered a shovelful of earth containing several hundred ants over part of the floor in his aviary and then stretched out on the floor close to birds—at times within 16 inches—to watch their reactions. (Some actually anted in his cupped hand.) In 16 experiments, 20 to his 31 species anted.

Add these 20 species to 20 others which have been reported and we have a total of at least 40 species which ant!

Pleasure Accompanies
With his laboratory study, Ivor confirmed what others had reported: the birds picked the live ants up with the tip of their bills and placed the ants on the undersides of the primary feathers of wing and tail. Evidently, great pleasure accompanied the act because the birds often closed their eyes and remained quiet, minutes at a time. (A procedure not unlike that of some humans when they have their back scratched.)

Apparently, anting is instinctive: at least when young starlings and a baby dipper were first presented with ants, they promptly seized them in their beaks and passed them through their feathers.

Why ant? Some bird experts say the ants crawling over the skin stimulates it. Or, that the small nipping the ants may do is exhilarating. Or, that the formic acid ants give off is a skin stimulant. Or, the formic acid is a pleasing odor. Or, it has antiseptic properties. Or, the ants rid the birds of parasites.

As for me, I'd just as soon believe that it's a mild form

By EUGENE BURNS
Ranger-Naturalist

of tickling or back scratching—the ants get at areas of the wing and tail which the bird cannot reach with beak or claw. But whatever, this act which was first called to the world's attention by a small boy—may well remain an ornithological mystery. And isn't that just as well?

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FORWARD PROTEST

Vienna, Austria—(U.P.)—Austria Friday forwarded a strong protest to Hungary over the violation of Austrian air space by two Communist jet fighters last Saturday.

Lawsuit Asks Grants Pass To Be Declared Railroad

Portland — (U.P.) — Federal court here has been petitioned by three Grants Pass businessmen who want the city of Grants Pass to be declared a railroad. Some 40 years ago the city built a now abandoned 14½ miles railway leading out of town. The road was surrendered to the California and Oregon Coast Railroad company and was taken over by receiver C. H. Demaray in 1925. The federal court complaint states the road was "revested" to the city in 1952 "subject only to the receivership and the obligations thereof" by the Josephine county circuit court. While the road was abandoned by the city in 1954, the complaint charges the abandonment was illegal because it was without Interstate Commerce commission approval. The S.H.&W. Lumber company, Chapman Lumber company and John Bakshas of Grants Pass claim that abandonment of the line has damaged them and forced them to use trucks. The city of Grants Pass asserts, however, that it is not a

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railroad and has no legal liability to the businessmen. Defendants, besides the city, are the California and Oregon Coast railway and Demaray.

SIGN CONTRACT

Klamath Falls—(U.P.)—A contract calling for a 4¼ per cent wage increase and fringe benefits was signed Friday by representatives of Klamath Basin Pine Mills Co. of Klamath Falls and the International Woodworkers of America local, according to Hal Geiger, union business agent. The agreement affects about 350 employees and was similar to agreements reached with five associations in the fir industry.

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